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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL HA

SUBJECT: HAITI: DIVISIONS IN LAVALAS DEEPEN AS PARTY  
CONSIDERS ELECTION STRATEGY

Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)  
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**¶1.** (C) Summary: Divisions within former Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas (FL) party were exposed in dramatic fashion on October 9 as competing factions of the party held organizational meetings to rally their supporters and prepare their strategy for next year's senatorial elections. Sources within an anti-Aristide group of Lavalas personalities headed by former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune say they plan to announce in November the creation of a "Special Committee" to run the party's affairs, which would expose a rift with the Aristide-appointed "Executive Committee" they have thus far chosen to keep private. Any public split within FL would further diminish the party's standing as senatorial elections planned for next year approach. End summary.

A MOSTLY ANTI-ARISTIDE FACTION PLANS CHANGES

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**¶2.** (C) In a televised meeting October 9, many Lavalas leaders and delegates from Haiti's ten departments met to consider the party's internal affairs and electoral strategy in advance of the upcoming senatorial elections. A largely anti-Aristide faction of the party, including former PM Yvon Neptune, former Chamber of Deputies President Yves Cristalin, and Deputy Jonas Coffy, organized the meeting. Neptune gave the headline speech, which stressed party unity. Lavalas Executive Committee member Annette Auguste ("So Ann") also spoke at the meeting, reaffirming her support for Aristide and blaming the United States and other international actors for his departure in 2004. (Comment: Auguste's presence was an anomaly because she, unlike the organizers of the event, comes from the Executive Committee and publicly supports the return of Aristide. She may be attempting to straddle the divide within the party to keep her options open. End comment.) Although most of the organizers of this assembly oppose Aristide's efforts to direct FL from afar and are at best ambivalent about his return to Haiti, the assembled activists passed a resolution calling for the return of Aristide to Haiti.

**¶3.** (C) Cristalin and Coffy (protect both) separately told Poloff October 10 that their group planned to announce by mid-November a "Special Committee" to organize the party's affairs in advance of the next elections. Cristalin said that the committee's first order of business would be to revise the internal structures of the party; he added that it was "too early" to choose the party's candidates for the

Senate. Coffy emphasized that their element of the party would accommodate other FL activists if they were willing to participate. According to one press report, Annette Auguste predicted in her speech that the meeting would set in motion a process that would lead to the "formation of a new Executive Committee."

...WHILE LOYALISTS GATHER AT THE ARISTIDE FOUNDATION

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¶4. (C) Lavalas Deputy Sorel Francois (protect) told Poloff October 10 that he attended a separate event the proceeding day at the Aristide Foundation for Democracy. The meeting, attended by Aristide spokeswoman Maryse Narcisse and "popular organization" leader Rene Civil, also included delegates from Haiti's ten departments. The attendees discussed prospective Senate candidates and criticized the Neptune group, asserting that Aristide opposed Neptune's efforts to "divide" the party. Francois and former Lavalas deputy Franky Exius said that the pro-Aristide faction of Lavalas is planning additional meetings for October 31 and November 3.

¶5. (C) Many Lavalas notables kept a conspicuously low profile on October 9, perhaps to avoid choosing sides or appearing to foment division. None of Poloff's four sources reported seeing Lavalas Senators Rudy Herivaux or Yvon Buissereth at either of the two gatherings. Franky Exius (protect) told Poloff October 13 that he avoided both meetings in order not to contribute to the impression that the party is divided. He gamely offered that the dueling events demonstrated the power of Lavalas, given that an estimated five hundred

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activists turned out for Neptune's event and another two hundred gathered at the Aristide Foundation.

COMMENT:

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¶6. (C) Fanmi Lavalas has muddled along without a united organization, leadership, or purpose ever since Aristide's departure four years ago. A significant test of the party's ability to unify will be the selection of senatorial candidates once the date of the upcoming elections is definitively set. The Yvon Neptune faction's "Special Committee," if created, will almost certainly clash with the Aristide-appointed "Executive Committee" and perhaps bring the long-simmering leadership battle within Lavalas to a boiling point. The resulting conflict would further divide the party's base and diminish its public standing. A "reconciliation committee" established some time ago has produced no visible effect, and many of our contacts are unaware of its existence. While reconciliation does remain a possibility, there is much bad blood hidden behind the blithe public assurances that the party remains united.

SANDERSON